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Grafton Notch from the North, with Old Spec to the right, ca. 1900.

GRAFTON, MAINE: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

By Margaret Joy Tibbetts

Author's Acknowledgements:

The definitive work for the history of the Town of Grafton is Charles B. Fobes "Grafton, Maine, a Human and Geographical Study" in Bulletin #42 of the University of Maine Studies. Mr. Fobes, a retired Meteorological Aide at the Weather Bureau Office in Portland, is a descendant of Captain James Brown who founded Grafton in the 1830s. Mr. Fobes also furnished to the Bethel Historical Society an article by a "Special Correspondent" in the Rumford Falls TIMES of August 26, 1899, which contains interesting information about some of the early settlers and early Grafton. I have used Mr. Fobes' work extensively, and he deserves our gratitude as the rescuer of Grafton's history from oblivion.

I have also used two sources brought to my attention by Randy Bennett, namely LOGGING RAILROADS OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS by C. Francis Belcher published by the Appalachian Mountain Club (Boston, 1980) and a portion of Farrar's ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK to Rangeley, Richardson, Kennebago, Umbagog and Parmachenee Lakes, published in Boston in 1879. Of considerable interest were the memoirs of Phyllis Davis in the possession of the Bethel Historical Society.

I was helped considerably by conversations with Beatrice Brooks Brown (granddaughter of the family which ran the Grafton Post Office for many years), Ernest Angevine, Roger Hanscom, who worked for years on the road through the

Notch, and Phyllis Davis Dock, who remembered Joe Chapman. Of basic use were the contributions from Grafton correspondents to the OXFORD COUNTY ADVERTISER and the OXFORD DEMOCRAT over the years (often very intermittent) from 1861 on, increasing in regularity by the end of the century. This material was transcribed and made available to me by Agnes Haines. For these sources and assistance I express my thanks.

The Town of Grafton surrendered its charter in 1919, the year in which I was born. The only buildings in Grafton which I can remember at all belonged to Joe Chapman who stayed on after the other Grafton citizens moved away. I do remember, however, going through Grafton when I was about five years old and our family accompanied by my father (Dr. Raymond R. Tibbetts) on a trip to Upton to see Cedric Judkins. In those days Upton was a substantial journey with a particularly difficult hill just as you approached the town. We stopped for a picnic on the way back before we reached the Notch. The Brown Company had just recently begun the process of reforestation and there were long thick rows of little evergreens, ranging from about three to nine inches high. My father and mother, who had grown up in 19th century rural Maine where the forests seemed limitless, could hardly believe that anyone would plant trees and exclaimed at the Brown Company's foresightedness.

The fate of the Grafton settlement had been determined by

(continued on page 2)

(Grafton, continued from page 1)

the fact that after seventy five to eighty years of hard cutting most of the easily accessible timber in the town was gone. Without lumber to cut and to sell the community could not exist. The physical realities of the area precluded much development beyond that of a pioneer logging settlement. Hemmed in between Mt. Speck and Saddleback (which some people call Baldpate) with one major road for access, there were several miles of relatively flat land above the Notch where there was room for farms but because of the short season, farming was of necessity limited; livestock, hay, sometimes potatoes, and grain (usually oats) were the main crops. Frosts came unfailingly in late June and mid-August and were not unknown in July. The average summer temperature in the warmest month (July) was sixty-six degrees.

Originally the area later called Grafton was known as Township A. Much of it belonged to out-of-state speculators. In 1830, James Brown of Canton made several trips to the area, walking through the Notch on a footpath, the only available road. He is said to have been preceded by Jesse Smith of Newry and his two sons. James Brown's purpose was to look for lumber. In 1834 he married Ruth Swan of Newry and brought her to a log cabin which he had built in what became Grafton.

Brown bought land and built a dam on the Cambridge River which rises in the Notch and flows north to Lake Umbagog, to the east of the present Route 26. He set up a sawmill there; these buildings were completed by 1838. In 1840, he began to build a barn and by 1842 constructed and furnished a large house of fourteen rooms and five fireplaces, where he lived until his death in 1881. For years Mrs. Brown cooked for the sizeable crews of lumbermen who worked for her husband. Their daughter, Mary, was born in 1839, the first child born in Grafton. She lived there all her life until the last two years (1908-1910) when she spent winters with her daughter in Lewiston.

The Brown house was located in an area above the present Grafton cemetery towards the Upton line. In time Mary Brown married George Otis who came to work for her father. The Otis house was right across the road from the Brown dwelling. Ernest Angevine as a boy lived in Upton and often came to Grafton. He has told me that Route 26 goes directly through the site of the Otis home so we can visualize the old Grafton road as over slightly to the east of the present road.

Other families soon followed the Brown settlement. Most of them also located above the Notch although, according to the 1858 Atlas, down near the Newry line were four farms. Most of the Grafton homes were near the road; an exception was the Morse homestead off to the west near the Upton line and the

Upton road known today as Back Street. The settlers who came worked in logging or in subsistence farming.

The first Grafton town records (now in the Newry Town Office) are sketchy indeed. The Newry town officials believe it is possible that some day other records may surface since not all of the records were turned over when Grafton was dissolved as a town (various local families had records in their possession). By 1852 there were enough residents for Grafton to be incorporated as a town. Reportedly James Brown's mother, Hannah, chose the name Grafton, perhaps because Grafton, Massachusetts is located beside Upton, Massachusetts. Most of the early town business dealt with schools and roads.

By 1854 there were nine scholars, thirty by 1856, thirty-seven by 1859. The numbers did not increase beyond this point and at times were lower. There were originally three school districts; houses were widely scattered and even Grafton children could walk only a certain distance to and from school. Originally schools were held in private homes. Eventually a schoolhouse was built, just above the Notch according to the Atlas of 1858. In 1854 the appropriation for schools was \$80. Most of the children probably attended the school in the schoolhouse on the Grafton flats, but probably school continued in private homes for the children who lived below the Notch. By the 1880s it would appear from the correspondents for the Norway papers that almost all of the children were together at the school house. During the worst of the winter weather there was no school; instead children had a term in the summer. Obviously the school was a matter of intense interest and there are frequent items in the Norway papers about teachers, occasional new textbooks, recitations, etc. A good number of children proportionate to the population went on to school according to news items, usually attending Gould Academy or Andover High school.

Road upkeep was for many years a grievous problem with some improvement coming almost at the end of Grafton's existence. Contact with the world depended on the road through the Notch; reading the correspondents' reports emphasizes the problem of Grafton's isolation, economically and psychologically. Deep snows in winter, possible floods in spring and fall, and the terrible torture of driving unpaved roads when the frost is coming out in the spring. For many years individuals were assigned areas of the road to work on, and it is easy to imagine that some areas were better tended than others. At best the roads were primitive and narrow; today by Mother Walker's Falls on the right of Route 26 one can see a small section of early road together with the small bridges, without rails. It must have been frightful in times of flooding. Throughout the years correspondents wrote often about road conditions, delay of the stage, no mail for several days and bridges out while the stage driver was forced to leave the road and at times walk or snowshoe for miles leading his horse. In the OXFORD COUNTY ADVERTISER of February 27, 1885, for example:

We are having very bad roads up this way, so bad the Stage had to leave the main road and take the R. Davis logging road a short time ago, and when our surveyor, A. J. Brooks, was notified to break out the roads, I heard he sent word back that he was logging this winter not breaking roads. And then Richmond Davis took his team out of the woods and broke the roads...Wednesday R. Davis and E. Brown had to take their teams out of the woods to break through Grafton Notch.

The period from 1850 to 1880 was for Grafton a period of growth and activity even though the Town never grew larger than 115, its population in 1880. In 1859 there were twenty-

EDITOR'S CORNER

The COURIER serves many purposes: it provides information about the Society to the organization's more than 1000 members and friends; it presents articles on local history and genealogy as well as reviews of books relating to western Maine history; it keeps readers aware of what the Society's museum store offers for sale; it provides a schedule of monthly meetings and notice of particular special events; it contains a membership application for anyone interested in membership to make certain they receive the COURIER each time it is published. All pretty important and all made possible by its faithful readers and supporters.

SRH

one men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. Some Grafton men enlisted in the Civil War. The fate of one of them reminds us how bitterly hard life could be in the 19th century. Barrett Wriston, wounded in 1862, was sent home from the Union Army; he died walking home on the road between Bethel and Grafton. He left a wife, who died soon after and three children. The oldest boy enlisted for the \$1,000 bounty and wages available; he survived the army, took his money and emigrated to Minnesota where he prospered.

Basically Grafton was always a very small and primitive pioneer settlement. There was a post office but never a real store. There was no church; in the summer ministers came occasionally from Upton or Newry for services in the school house and there were occasional evangelical "missionaries" to the men in the lumber camps.

Life centered on logging and farming with logging the dominant community interest. There were big lumber camps, in some cases over a hundred men with almost as many horses. In the spring after the camps closed there were large crews who worked to get the logs down the Cambridge River to Lake Umbagog where they were sent down the Androscoggin. By late summer various entrepreneurs would be in Grafton making their plans and by November camps would be set up and men arriving from other parts of Maine, New England, and Canada. Year after year the correspondents noted the arrival of the crews, the plans of various local women to cook for them, the work piling up for the blacksmiths and the provision of hay and oats for the camps by the local farmers. Often there were reports of the amounts planned for cutting that year, for example, on November 20, 1885 "We understand there is to be some five or six millions of feet of timber put in the Cambridge River this winter."

When logging ended for the winter depending on the weather late March or April interest shifted to the river drive with the height of water always a strong concern; low water meant particular difficulties.

With summer came the easiest time of the year. The Stage arrived every day instead of twice a week or even less, and there were many visitors, either former Graftonites back to see relatives or strangers from the city who came for fresh air. (We forget how foul and disease-ridden 19th century cities often were.) The local people went blueberrying and raspberrying everywhere; both berries were plentiful and were reportedly picked by the barrel. It was not uncommon to see bears when berrying with such jokes in the paper as "Uncle Joe Bennett met a bear when picking blueberries the other day. He did not say which one picked more berries." There were occasional picnics and socials always with refreshments. To be sure, sometimes the nights were cold and there were worries about deer in the garden or rotting potatoes but invariably references were made to beautiful summer days.

In the 1870s tourism was becoming something of an economic factor. FARRAR'S ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK (1879) describes the trip from Bethel to Upton along lines familiar to many of us except for the time involved; Farrar says that if one leaves Bethel after arrival on the morning train, Upton is reached by early evening. The sights along the way are carefully listed: Poplar Tavern, Screw Auger Falls, the Devil's Horseshoe (a large horseshoe shaped indentation in the rock above Screw Auger), and the Jail (a deep hole made in stone with sides too high and steep to climb from easily) and Moose Cave. Neither the Devil's Horseshoe nor the Jail are identified for tourists by today's road signs but our family always visited them in the 1930s. The roads are described as very narrow and the bridges of logs with no protective rails.

Most of the tourists who came to Grafton over the next forty

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

In the summer of 1976, the Ouwinga family moved from the grimy steel mill section of Hamilton, Ontario to Bethel, Maine. Bethel with its historic district, the Gould campus and surrounding scenic areas was so beautiful that we kept pinching ourselves to see if we were dreaming.

During that first summer and fall we made frequent discovery trips. One of our favorite areas was Grafton Notch. Screw Auger Falls, Moose Cave, Mother Walker Falls and the picnic area at the north end of the scenic route were special places for us and for the visitors who took advantage of our move to Maine. New discoveries such as Step Falls and Table Rock increased our love for the Grafton region.

Now, after many years some of the amazement and wonder have worn off, but the sheer beauty of the mountainside opposite Step Falls will never fail us. Our first-time visitors soon planned return trips.

In this time of rapid development, it is imperative that we never forget what the Grafton area has to offer. Such places of unspoiled beauty are becoming an "endangered species" in the late twentieth century.

Marvin Ouwinga

years came for the hunting and fishing. The fishing was marvelous. In August of 1884 the correspondent noted that Leander Bennett caught forty-three trout in an hour. Leslie Davis remembered that it was not uncommon for his mother to ask him in mid-morning to catch enough fish for dinner. The hunting was also good but at times more difficult; local men usually got a deer more easily than did the visitors.

Reading these reports which cover some forty-five years bring out certain aspects of Grafton life. Accidents were common; children cut themselves on scythes, at times badly, or stabbed themselves with pitchforks; the men who worked in the woods were always at risk, accidents with saws or axes, falling limbs, runaway horses. At times there were deaths resulting; today in the Grafton cemetery one can see the marker for a young man lost in the Cambridge River. There were no facilities for local care and no way to get treatment except to harness a horse and head down through the Notch for Bethel.

Illnesses were also common, at times serious and even potentially terrifying. The news of diphtheria or typhoid in one of the lumber camps could send a chill through the community as happened in the 1870s and 1880s although fortunately there were no epidemics. But pneumonia was well-known and always a threat, as was consumption. One gets the impression of a community with a good number of very tough and strong individuals who were able to survive but where the difficulties of climate and location meant that weaker members were eliminated by disease, more quickly than in larger and less remote communities. Almost every family experienced one or more early deaths.

Despite hardships Grafton citizens met life with courage and energy. They had simple and small pleasures, and they enjoyed each other. There were parties to which everyone was invited and to which almost everyone went. There was dancing and the refreshments were always carefully noted, such as molasses candy, roasted peanuts, lemonade in the summer, berry pies, fudge from a new recipe, etc. There was a Fourth of July picnic for the children and a Christmas tree at the schoolhouse each year. By 1890 the Stage brought fresh fish every Friday and at

(continued on page 4)

SOCIETY SALES DEPARTMENT

The Society maintains a selection of modestly priced gifts and historical publications. These may be ordered at the prices listed below. Maine residents should include 5% sales tax. Orders under \$10 should include \$1 for postage and handling; those over \$10 but under \$20 should include \$2 and all those over \$20 should include \$3 for postage and handling.

Moses Mason House Tile \$3.50
Stationery (package of ten sheets and ten envelopes) \$2 ea.

Moses Mason House
Summer House
Bethel Railroad Station
Bethel Covered Bridge

Booklets

"Bethel's Broad Street" 75¢
"The Family Farm" 75¢
"Made in Bethel" 75¢
"Dr. Moses Mason and His House" \$1
"Molly Ockett" \$2

Maps and Atlases

1880 Map of Bethel Hill \$2
1880 Map of Entire Town (Bethel) \$2
1878 Bird's Eye View of Bethel Hill \$1
1858 Atlas of Oxford County \$6.50

Tote Bag (Moses Mason Museum logo) \$7.50
Placemats, 4 Season (set of four) \$7.50

Special Editions

Bethel Citizen (1974) \$1
Indian Raid '81 \$1

Books

Russell, INDIAN NEW ENGLAND BEFORE THE MAYFLOWER \$11.95

William B. Lapham, HISTORY OF WOODSTOCK, MAINE \$19.95

B. G. Willey, INCIDENTS IN WHITE MOUNTAIN HISTORY \$25

Maxim & Lapham, HISTORY OF PARIS \$55

Holt, GRAND TRUNK LINES OF NEW ENGLAND \$24.95

D. B. Wight, WILD RIVER WILDERNESS \$4

Francis Parkman, THE GOULD ACADEMY STORY \$7.50

MAINE IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC \$29.95

BETHEL HISTORICAL SOCIETY COOKBOOK \$5

Thomas Hubka, BIG HOUSE, LITTLE HOUSE, BACK HOUSE BARN: THE CONNECTED FARM BUILDINGS OF NEW ENGLAND Paper \$19.95. Cloth \$29.95

William B. Lapham, HISTORY OF NORWAY, MAINE \$55

M. F. King, ANNALS OF OXFORD \$35

Jean Lipman, RUFUS PORTER REDISCOVERED \$14.95

A TRUTHFUL LIKENESS: CHESTER HARDING AND HIS PORTRAITS \$25

Paula Wight, NEWRY PROFILES \$5

Eva Bean, EAST BETHEL ROAD \$50

R. H. Bennett, OXFORD COUNTY, MAINE \$18

William B. Lapham, HISTORY OF BETHEL, 1768-1890 \$45

F. W. Kilbourne, CHRONICLES OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS \$20

T-Shirts

Moses Mason Museum (Adult) (S,M,L,XL) \$7

Moses Mason Museum (Child's) (4-6-8-10-12-14) \$6

Sudbury Canada 1768-1796 (Adult) (S,M,L,XL) \$7

Sudbury Canada 1768-1796 (Child's) (4-6-8-10-12-14) \$6

Post Cards: Dr. Mason, Agnes Mason,

Moses Mason House 10¢ ea.

Bethel Historical Society Calendar, 1989 \$6

Members of the Bethel Historical Society are entitled to a 10% discount for purchases totaling \$10 or more. Please send orders to the Society at P.O. Box 12, Bethel, Maine 04217. They will be sent by return mail.

(Grafton, continued from page 3)

times there were oyster stew parties. The women under the leadership of Mary Brown Otis organized a Library, which for years was a source of pleasure and pride; gifts from summer visitors were noted with great satisfaction. Even in the winter they were able to find a source of pleasure in one woman's large collection of house plants or in the handiwork of another's work on quilts. And always there was the thrill of an occasional trip to Bethel or Andover to anticipate and to enjoy. Leslie Davis notes what a treat it was to visit a store twice a year.

By the 1890s the major part of the logging was for soft wood for the Berlin Mills; this cutting was done in the extreme west of Grafton very near the New Hampshire line. In 1893 the Success Township logging railroad was built from Berlin to the New Hampshire line to take logs directly from Grafton to Berlin. For a number of years this logging was intense; in the first year of using the railroad twenty million board feet of soft wood was taken out. This operation lasted for fourteen years until here too much of the accessible (and therefore profitable) wood had been cut. In 1907 this railroad service ceased.

The change in Grafton's fortunes with the cutting of the wood comes through indirectly and gradually in the correspondents' account of Grafton doings. More and more items concern Grafton men going to Rangeley or Errol or Milan to log. Increasingly it is said that only small crews are cutting "this year" in Grafton. It is clear that there was much discussion of other types of work either actual or anticipated. Men were doing guiding as much as possible. Some were cooking in various establishments such as Poplar Tavern, rather than in the lumber camps. Others were gathering spruce gum to sell or going to Gorham, New Hampshire to see if they could get work. From 1890 on more and more the Grafton children who went away to school were staying on to work, coming home only for vacation. The town was dwindling to fewer and fewer homesteads, increasingly inhabited by older people. In 1904 when Leslie Davis was twelve, his family left for Hanover where it was easier to make a living farming. He noted that in the Grafton schools by the late 1890s there were only ten pupils.

In 1910 Mary Brown Otis, the first child born in Grafton, died; she was the last of the founding family still living there, for the Browns had prospered but scattered to other Maine towns and cities. Her death brought the sale of the old Brown house which for so many years had housed lumbermen and boarders as well as the family; the Brown Company bought and used it for storage. Without prospects of real work for the men, Grafton could not survive. In 1919 the Town surrendered its Charter and the remaining farms were sold to the Brown Company except for Joe Chapman who lived in Grafton until the 1940s and spent his last year with Leslie Davis.

In the early 1920s the Brown Company razed the remaining buildings in Grafton to lessen the dangers of fire. Today it is hard to find traces, even cellar holes, of the homes that were once there because of years of bulldozing, road construction timber cutting, and reforestation. Even if its inhabitants had not cut off their wood so prodigally, Grafton could not have survived for there was no other source of livelihood.

Of the lost towns of Oxford County, Grafton is particularly interesting. It was a pioneer community in New England at a time when most Americans think of pioneers only in terms of the settlers streaming west in covered wagons. Despite its remoteness, its smallness, and its lack of many amenities, Grafton was a community of good standards and sound values. Its citizens worked well together and met their problems with courage and resilience. Today descendants of those Grafton families who left to settle in other Oxford County towns remain justifiably proud of their Grafton origins.

BOOK REVIEW

NORWAY IN THE FORTIES By Dr. Osgood N. Bradbury. (Norway, Maine: Twin Town Graphics, 1986. Pp. 733. Cloth. \$25).

THE HISTORY OF NORWAY, MAINE. By William B. Lapham. Somersworth, NH: New England History Press in collaboration with the Norway Historical Society, 1986. Pp. 718. Cloth. \$55).

BOUND BY MEMORIES' TIES: A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF NORWAY, MAINE. By Rev. Don L. McAllister. (Norway: By the Author, 1988. Pp. 237. Paper. \$25).

Order from the Norway Historical Society, P.O. Box 167, Norway, Maine 04268 Attention: Irene Campbell, Treasurer

The Town of Norway's recent bicentenary of settlement has resulted in the publication of three significant books which will assist researchers in understanding the history of this western Maine town. Dr. Osgood N. Bradbury's **NORWAY IN THE FORTIES** is a collection of newspaper columns, written for the **Norway ADVERTISER** by Dr. Bradbury between 1886 and 1897. Here is collected a wealth of genealogical data as well as insights into the history of that town. This book was a project of Rev. Don L. McAllister, who has stimulated so much interest in his town; anyone researching Norway topics will be forever grateful for his efforts. There are, however, typographical errors and on page 652 some data found in the original newspapers has been inadvertently omitted. Also the fact that the book has no index makes it difficult to use (Agnes H. Haines of the Bethel Historical Society has produced an index for this volume which is available at the Society's Eva Bean Research Room.)

New England History Press in collaboration with the Norway Historical Society has performed a valuable service in reprinting William B. Lapham's 1886 **HISTORY OF NORWAY**, which was previously difficult to find and once found expensive to acquire. This handsomely bound edition is graced with a useful introduction by Rev. McAllister and made more accessible to researchers than the original by a new index prepared by Agnes H. Haines.

Rev. McAllister's **BOUND BY MEMORIES' TIES** is an important visual document for those interested in Norway's past. Here in one volume is presented a wide variety of views of the town's built environment. Norway's rich architectural heritage is presented here in all its glory. Rev. McAllister might have broadened his brush to include photographs depicting more social history instead of focusing primarily on buildings, some of which he does not mention are no longer there. But that is a minor quibble and should not detract from the fact that this book fills a central void in understanding Norway's past.

S.R.H.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

SYLVIA ELLIS, Wellesley, MA, is a summer resident of Andover, ME. ARLENE D. LOWELL, Bethel, is a very active member of the Society's Garden and Grounds Committee and a volunteer each week during the winter months in research and collection management projects. DAVID and CHERI THURSTON, Bethel, own the Sudbury Inn and live on Broad Street.

IN MEMORIAM

Died in Norway, Maine, September 9, 1988, Barbara Miller, contributing member since 1980 and generous donor.



Noll Award recipient SUDIE VACHON holds Revere bowl as the 1988 recipient of the Marjorie MacArthur Noll Volunteer Service Award received from Society Trustee Chairman MARGARET JOY TIBBETTS. Members of the Noll family joined Miss Tibbetts for the presentation. From left to right are GEORGE NOLL, Bethel, ROBIN NOLL, Southwest Harbor, MISS TIBBETTS, MRS. VACHON, PENNY BECKMAN, Litchfield, CT and JEAN BARKER, Delray Beach, FL. Photo courtesy of Donald S. Brown.

23rd ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 1

The 23rd annual meeting of the Society was held on September 1 in the meeting room of the Dr. Moses Mason House beginning with the traditional pot luck supper coordinated by the Special Projects Committee headed by Persis Post.

During the business portion of the meeting, the report of the Nominating Committee consisting of Charles Raymond, representing the Board of Trustees and Edna York and Betty Perkins, the general membership, presented the following slate of officers and trustees which was approved by those present: President, Marvin Ouwinga; Vice President, Jane Hosterman; Secretary and Clerk of the Trustees, Kenneth Bohr; Treasurer, Margaret Joy Tibbetts; Trustee for three years, Mary C. Keniston. The president thanked the retiring officers Charles Raymond and Mary C. Keniston for their services during the past three years as Secretary and treasurer respectively. He reported that the Society had enjoyed another successful year and cited some of the highlights: nearly fifty donors made donations to the collections of the Society, over one hundred new members added, over \$7500 added to the Society's endowment, successful Homecoming, "Christmas with the Masons", Heritage Day, Faye Taylor Memorial Art Show, Dr. Moses Mason Birthday and Sudbury Canada Days special events, the addition of the Maine Old Cemetery Records on microfilm to the Society's Eva Bean Research Room through the generosity of an anonymous donor, the addition of the **ADVERTISER DEMOCRAT** (1933-1986) on microfilm made possible from the interest of the Twitchell fund and the generosity of an anonymous donor, the receipt of the Harry W. Rowe Award from the Maine League of Historical Societies and Museums for outstanding work in local history, the award of a preservation commendation from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for its work in historic preservation and the publication of **OXFORD COUNTY, MAINE: A GUIDE TO ITS HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE**, the return of one of the signs that once graced the Bethel railroad station through the generosity

(continued on page 6)



Dr. Joseph A. Conforti, Director of New England Studies, University of Southern Maine (left) poses with Society president, Dr. Marvin Ouwinga at the 23rd annual meeting. Dr. Conforti was the featured speaker. Photo courtesy of Donald S. Brown.

(Annual Meeting, continued from page 5)

of several donors, and successful outreach programs with Crescent Park School fifth graders and Gould Academy students in local history.

A video "Life in the 1830s" by Miss Newcomb's fifth grade social studies class was shown. It was filmed last spring on location in the Dr. Moses Mason House and on its grounds.

Trustee Chairman Margaret Joy Tibbetts presented the Society's 1988 Marjorie MacArthur Noll Volunteer Service Award to Sudie Vachon. Miss Tibbetts cited Mrs. Vachon's long service (since 1974) on the Garden and Grounds Committee. As head of the Committee, Mrs. Vachon and her committee worked ceaselessly to ensure that the gardens and grounds of the Dr. Moses Mason House are one of the assets of Bethel. Mrs. Vachon also served as a guide in the museum, assisted with the Sudbury Canada Days Flower Show for many years and been a contributor with her husband to the Society's endowment campaign. Members of Mrs. Noll's family were present for the second presentation of the award for volunteer service established in 1987 by her family and friends in her memory.

The speaker for the evening was Dr. Joseph A. Conforti, Director of New England Studies at the University of Southern Maine. Dr. Conforti, who holds A.M. and Ph.D. degrees from Brown University and is the author of numerous articles and two books relating to New England history, titled his presentation "Reinventing New England."

Once again much credit goes to members of the Special Projects Committee for their work in making the annual meeting such a success and to Barbara Herrick Brown for her always attractive centerpieces for the tables.

REFLECTIONS OF A HALF CENTURY

(continued from the last issue)

By Leslie E. Davis

Automobiles were not very good and roads were not very good; tires were definitely very poor in 1918 so we were four days crossing New York State, including a side trip to see Niagara Falls. Tires in those days were good for only 2500 to 3000 miles and nobody carried a mounted spare. We had from two to four flat tires every day and I had to repair them right on the road.

On the way east we stopped overnight in Boston with Marie's brother, Porter Swan. I think it took us a full week or possibly a little more to make the trip from Erie, PA to Locke Mills, ME, but it was a good experience. Richard was two years old that spring.

I resigned from the Railway Mail Service during the winter while in Erie and contemplated going back into it after returning to Maine. I decided against it as I felt I would like to get into some kind of business for myself and the Mail Service kept our family life pretty well broken up.

During those war years, farming was pretty important. My father had a farm of four hundred acres in Newry on which he needed more help, so after some negotiating I bought a half interest in his farm and we moved to Newry. We fixed up separate living quarters upstairs in the Newry farmhouse; Marie, Richard and I lived up there. We didn't have much cash money to put into this deal, probably not more than \$250 to \$300. I recall that I sold the Overland some time during that summer for \$60 or \$65 as I didn't need it. I still had the Chevrolet roadster at that time, which was a much better automobile.

On October 22, 1918, our daughter Phyllis was born at Locke Mills, ME. Marie went home to her parents' house for this party and her sister Alma cared for her. While she was there, we got word that my brother Irving had died in Portsmouth, NH of the "flu." This epidemic which occurred during World War I was variously called influenza, "Black Flu" and other names; thousands died of it. Marie's sister Maude Swan was taken by it in the spring of 1919.

I went to Portsmouth and arranged to have Irving's body shipped home to be buried in the family lot at the Hanover Cemetery. We had no funeral service as we felt the contagiousness of the disease made it too risky.

We ran the Newry farm together about three years and did quite a lot of business. We had about twenty-five head of cattle, about seventy-five sheep, four or five hogs, and an orchard of around 1000 apple trees. We made maple syrup in the spring and did quite a bit of logging in the winter. Earl and Robert were both living with my father at the time. Earl worked with us carrying on the farm and Bob was still very young.

In the late winter of 1920 I bought what was left of a birch mill on Sunday River that was once run by C. Albert Baker and made arrangements with Eli Stearns to let me set it up in the old barn cellar on the farm just north of Great Brook in Newry. I had made a stumpage deal with Mr. Stearns and with what we had on Father's farm, there would be enough to keep a small mill running during off seasons on the farm, indefinitely. I dismantled the mill during the late winter and spring, walking over the mountain road each day as it was located on Sunday River almost directly west of our place on Bear River. Most of the small machinery, shafting and belting we brought over by horse team and stored in the barn and apple house on Father's farm in Newry. The mill was steam powered and I got the boiler stripped and ready to move in the early part of April, hiring

Henry Learned to haul it over on sled with a four horse team. We went over very early in the morning and got it loaded; we started soon after sunrise as the snow was melting pretty fast each day.

Everything went well until we got down by the old Godwin place on the Sunday River Road where there were several water holes in the road and one side of the sleds cut through the ice. On one of these holes which was deeper than most, the chains holding the boiler broke and it rolled completely off the sleds and into the ditch. It was impossible to reload it that day, and the weather continued warm so that hauling by sleds was out of the question.

We never did finish moving the boiler and engine; I finally sold them for junk as well as most of the rest of the equipment. My first venture into the mill business did not prove very profitable as I paid Mr. Baker \$600 for the outfit and salvaged only about \$235 from the sale of what I was able to dispose of. I have charged off the balance to education by experience.

(to be continued in the next issue)

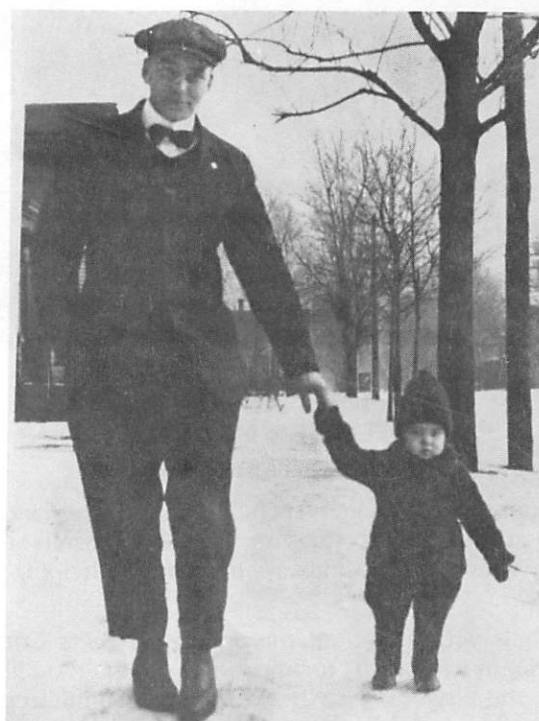
NEW SOCIETY SECRETARY AND CLERK OF THE TRUSTEES SELECTED

At the annual meeting of the Society on September 1, Kenneth Bohr was selected Secretary and Clerk of the Trustees, succeeding Charles F. Raymond, who was constitutionally ineligible for re-election.

Mr. Bohr was born near Boston and grew up in Massachusetts, Ohio and Ontario. A 1941 engineering graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he served in World War II and studied economics after the war also at M.I.T. He worked as an industrial economist for the World Bank in Washington, DC for thirty two years, retiring in 1982. He spent four years during his career living with his family in India. Following his retirement, he and his wife Gwyneth bought their present home on Chapman Street in 1982.

Very active in the community, Mr. Bohr's activities include the Aspirations Project at Telstar Regional High School, Friends of the Androscoggin, and the Bethel Affordable Housing Committee. He is also on the board of the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

Mr. Bohr's interests include gardening, canoeing, conservation and reading history.



Leslie Davis and son Richard L. Davis, Erie, PA, 1918. Photo courtesy of Phyllis Davis Dock.

NINTH ANNUAL SUDBURY CANADA DAYS HELD AUGUST 13-14

The 9th annual Sudbury Canada Days, the Society's summer heritage festival, was held on August 13-14. There was a good attendance despite the ninety degree temperatures. As usual there were very successful events including the annual Children's Parade, the flower show, craft demonstrations and exhibits, children's games, art show, horseshoe, croquet and badminton tournaments. The Log Driver's Bean supper attracted its usual large numbers and the variety show was once more a popular success. The old fashioned church service at the West Parish Congregational Church was well-received. This year's addition was a logging and farming exhibit in the Hastings barn next to the Society's headquarters, the Dr. Moses Mason House. Here were featured a large number of logging and farming tools in addition to wagons, carriages, and logging sleds. Much appreciation is expressed to all those who made the 1988 festival such a success.

Join the Bethel Historical Society dedicated to preserving and interpreting the local past.

Membership in the Society entitles you to:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) free admission to the museum | (5) quarterly publication |
| (2) special discounts at museum store | (6) reduced course fees |
| (3) preferred rate for meeting room rental | (7) voting rights in the Society |
| (4) special library and archival privileges | (8) special invitations to Society occasions |

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..... Senior (over 55 years) \$3

..... Life over 55 years \$50 single

..... Life over 55 years \$75 couple

..... Life under 55 years \$100 single

..... Life under 55 years \$150 couple

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..... Corporate \$50



Sarah and Ranald Stevens

MEMBER PROFILE

Ranald and Sarah Stevens

Undoubtedly the Society members with the best attendance record at monthly meetings are Ranald and Sarah Stevens of Bethel. They are almost always present and helping in many ways.

Sarah is very active on the Special Projects Committee, preparing refreshments for meetings, serving food at Society events, and assisting with the work of the Committee. Randal has served for several years on the Nominating Committee and transported handicapped and elderly members to Society meetings and events. Both have been contributors to the Society's endowment campaigns and honorary members for several years. They are also very active in community affairs, including the Methodist Church and Bethel Senior Citizens.

Ranald was born in Bethel in 1906, graduated from Gould Academy in 1925 and spent much of his adult life as a mechanic, first at Connor's Garage and then at his own Steve's Garage, which he operated from 1950 to 1973 when he retired.

Sarah was born in Wentworth Location, NH, December 23, 1909. She attended schools in Grafton, Newry and Upton before working in the Bethel area and in Rhode Island until her retirement.

SOCIETY OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES

Marvin Ouwinga, President; Jane Hosterman, Vice President; Kenneth Bohr, Secretary and Clerk of the Trustees; Margaret Joy Tibbetts, Treasurer; Trustees: Donald S. Brown, Lynda H. Chandler, Alden T. Kennett, Mary C. Keniston, Sylvia Wight



Society president Marvin Ouwinga poses with Jane Radcliffe beside the Rufus Porter murals in the Dr. Moses Mason House prior to the August monthly meeting where Ms. Radcliffe was the featured speaker on "Early 19th Century Wall Decorators." This monthly meeting was one in a series commemorating the 175th anniversary of the construction of the Dr. Moses Mason House. Photo courtesy of Donald S. Brown.

The Bethel Historical Society
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